Sometimes It Does Take A Rocket Scientist…

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Georgia firms with out-of-this-world technical problems may soon find that NASA can help them find some down-to-Earth solutions.

Working with Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute, MSFC has established a new video conferencing center at Georgia Tech's Center for Manufacturing Information Technology (CMIT) in Atlanta. NASA's goal is to help Georgia industrialists, educators and entrepreneurs discuss technical problems directly with NASA scientists and engineers at Marshall and—it is hoped—find a solution.

Videoconferencing technology allows voice and video interaction so groups can communicate live over long distances. Establishment of the videoconferencing center eliminates the need for Georgia business persons to travel to MSFC in Alabama. Collaboration between Georgia businesses and NASA can now take place at the videoconferencing center, making optimum use of their time for the least cost. Georgians can arrange to use the video teleconferencing center to speak face to face with those NASA scientists or engineers at MSFC who are best qualified to provide technical assistance or recommendations.

The CMIT frequently hosts visits by business and industry leaders from across the state and serves as a convenient location for videoconferencing. It showcases the latest in manufacturing information technologies available to Georgia firms. Visitors can learn about the latest computer and communications technologies by participating in training classes and trying out some of the latest software to enhance their businesses' competitiveness at home and abroad.

Harry G. Craft, Jr., manager of MSFC's Technology Transfer Office, arranged NASA's loan of the video teleconferencing equipment necessary to establish the link between Georgia and the space agency. Craft said, "The establishment of the videoconferencing center provides an efficient, economical way to transfer of Federal technologies and expertise to industries across Georgia. NASA seeks to return taxpayer-funded technologies to U.S. business; a service the public rightly expects to receive from this nation's space program. The Marshall Center often will provide firms with technical assistance free of charge."

On September 19, 1996, the videoconferencing center hosted a special program from NASA. Business leaders electronically met NASA personnel and learned, firsthand, how to participate in the NASA technology transfer program. Demonstrations and information on NASA's materials science and plasma spray process were included. Instead of the one-way communication of regular video programming, the participants were able to ask questions on the spot and interact with NASA scientists.

NASA technology transfer makes available thousands of items developed for use in space that have down-to-Earth industrial applications. Lightweight materials, heat resistant shielding, remote sensing, cryogenic technologies, insulating foams, welding technologies, computer software, and a host of other inventions, developments and innovations from the space program are finding commercial applications each day. By mid-summer 1996, more than 5,000 U.S. firms had benefited from NASA assistance. A survey of NASA technology transfer's economic impact on Georgia from January 1993 to May 1996 showed assistance provided more than $42 million in economic benefits, with 492 jobs saved or added to the state's work rolls. More than 60 new or improved products were being manufactured in the state, all thanks to technology transfers from the nation's space program.

To arrange a video conference with NASA, Georgia business persons should contact the CMIT's Margi Berbari at 1–404–894–0357.

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Biographical Sketch: Bob Lessels is the technical writer/editor (physical sciences) for the Technology Transfer Office at the Marshall Center. A graduate of the University of Nebraska, he has been a professional journalist for the past 30 years. He joined NASA in 1986.